



Security Council

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Letter dated 29 July 2016 from the Permanent Representatives of Spain and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

Spain and the United Kingdom, as co-chairs of the Security Council Informal Expert Group on Women, Peace and Security, have the honour to transmit herewith a summary note of the meeting held on 29 April 2016 on the situation of women, peace and security in Iraq (see annex).

We should be grateful if you would have the present letter and its annex circulated as a document of the Security Council.

(Signed) Román Oyarzun
Ambassador

Permanent Representative of Spain to the United Nations

(Signed) Matthew Rycroft
Ambassador

Permanent Representative of the United Kingdom to the United Nations



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Security Council Informal Expert Group on Women, Peace and Security

Summary of meeting on Iraq, 29 April 2016

On 29 April, the Informal Expert Group on Women, Peace and Security was briefed by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Iraq, Ján Kubiš, and the Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Iraq, Lise Grande, from United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) headquarters in Baghdad and the United Nations Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights, Kathryn Gilmore, from Geneva.

The Special Representative noted that the situation of women in Iraq had deteriorated sharply and emphasized four elements in that regard: (a) there was low participation of women in crucial bodies, such as those working on national reconciliation, and they had little influence in bodies where they have relatively higher participation, such as parliament; (b) widespread protection needs existed with regard to women from minority communities, in particular displaced and refugee women and those in areas controlled by Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL); (c) the government reform process that had begun a year and a half ago had shown some positive signs, such as general messages of inclusiveness and the adoption of the national action plan on resolution 1325 (2000), but the Ministry of Women had been abolished and increased representation of women in the new cabinet appeared unlikely; and (d) the integrated gender task force of the United Nations, led by the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) and the UNAMI gender adviser, was determined and motivated but could do little in such a difficult environment.

The Deputy Special Representative added that women shoulder the responsibility of reestablishing the household when returning to areas newly liberated from ISIL, yet women did not have formal representation in the political process and are excluded from the process of negotiating or receiving the compensation packages for returnees administered by the government. This process is managed by four command cells chaired by the government and composed of members of the security forces, tribal sheikhs, imams and notable members of the community — none of the cells include a single woman. Mechanisms set up to provide front-line services to women and girls fleeing conflict-affected areas, such as the United Nations Population Fund mobile units, are oversubscribed and the most underfunded component of the humanitarian efforts. In the next six months, an additional 2.2 to 2.5 million newly displaced persons are expected, and such persons are often seen by the government and the communities as having supported ISIL. The screening process will extract many men and boys, leading to family separation and the potential for abuse of women.

The Deputy High Commissioner provided a briefing on her recent visit to Iraq and noted the patterns of sexual violence against and sexual slavery of women and girls from minority communities, as well as increased domestic violence, early

marriage, female genital mutilation and so-called honour killings. Large numbers of Iraqi men and women are illegally detained, often without charge or for political motives, and often subjected to torture and ill-treatment, including sexual abuse.

A representative of UN-Women, the secretariat of the group, provided a list of recommendations related to furthering the implementation of the women, peace and security agenda in Iraq, through UNAMI, the Government of Iraq and the Security Council.

The representative of the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict noted the use of sexual violence as a tactic to increase revenue and strengthen the recruitment base through ransom payments and human trafficking; sexual violence committed by pro-government militias; and the need for high-level political commitment from the Government of Iraq on this issue and sufficient staffing capacity in the mission.

In response to questions from Member States, participants in Baghdad and New York noted the following:

- The current report on UNAMI does not contain much information on women, peace and security, and it is difficult to obtain gender-specific information and sex-disaggregated statistics, but the mission will work on enhancing that in the next report.
- In the absence of a Ministry of Women, the gender portfolio in the government is split between Foreign Affairs and Justice, which is inadequate.
- The language of the mission's mandate should be more explicit and specific about women's political participation and place pressure on the Government of Iraq to take action to ensure that participation and the adoption of several key pending draft laws, such as on family protection.
- The Government of Iraq should facilitate the adoption of a General Assembly resolution to protect women and girls from religious and ethnic minorities, proposed by the High Council of Women Affairs in Kurdistan.
- Notwithstanding significant representation of women in parliament, they have little influence on what is put to a vote, given that such matters are pushed through parliamentary committees and are decided by political blocs, in which women have very little representation.
- The government has funded discussions about the national action plan but not its implementation. The international community has a collective responsibility to ensure funding. Member States should make their World Bank loans conditional upon guaranteeing earmarked funding for the plan.
- The United Nations Development Programme flagship stabilization programme (cash-for-work programmes) has a dedicated window for women's empowerment, but few women participate owing to resistance from the communities.
- A total of 10 per cent of women are widows that must provide for their families, whereas less than 15 per cent of Iraqi women participate in the labour force. This leads to negative coping mechanisms, such as sexual exploitation or child marriage. Without identity documents, women cannot access services, and the large economic empowerment programmes and cash-for-work

programmes are not aimed at them. Women's economic empowerment will require more imaginative modalities of engagement, such as self-employment.

- The draft bill on family protection has elements to regulate shelters, but after being submitted to parliament in 2015, it was sent back for review given that it was considered anti-Sharia, and nothing has been advanced since then. Shelters are often linked to misperceptions among communities. Family protection units are closing down because of the fiscal crisis.
- The women's movement in Iraq is vibrant, and there is much potential for coalition-building and transcending sectarian lines with regard to the women's rights agenda.

In conclusion, the Special Representative committed to reiterate to the Prime Minister of Iraq the importance of including more women in his cabinet and other government bodies, including on national reconciliation; enhance the information and analysis on women, peace and security in the next report of UNAMI to the Security Council and to highlight these issues in upcoming briefings; and strengthen the capacity of the mission with regard to gender and women's protection, such as through the deployment of a women's protection adviser. He asked for the support of Member States to make a new budgetary post possible in the coming months.

The co-chairs of the Informal Expert Group reiterated their thanks to the Special Representative and encouraged him to raise women, peace and security issues in the subsequent week's Security Council consultations and identify some specific goals related to the topics discussed that could be achieved over the next 6-12 months and beyond, and on which the Informal Expert Group would follow up. A second, more focused Informal Expert Group meeting on Iraq will take place before the end of 2016.